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## Modern Language Teaching in the Frankfurt "Musterschule".

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It was my privilege during the past summer (1909) to spend some four weeks in visiting a few of the German secondary schools, including a week each at the *Musterschule, Realgymnasium* in Frankfurt on the Main, the *Realgymnasium und Realschule* in Lüdenscheid, Westphalia, and the *städtische Gymnasium und Realgymnasium* in Düsseldorf. As my purpose was to gain a first-hand acquaintance with the actual class-room methods of teaching modern languages in Germany, it was but natural that I should spend much the greater portion of my time—some 60 classes were visited in all—with the teachers of English, French and German.

It is not an altogether simple or easy matter to obtain official permission to visit the Prussian schools, especially for a longer period. But this permission once secured my troubles were over. Everywhere I was accorded a most ready and cordial welcome. Directors and masters vied with one another in making my stay pleasant and profitable, even to the extent of sharing with me their *zweites Frühstück*. I am very glad of this opportunity of expressing my sincere thanks for the many kind attentions shown me, especially to Max Walter, Director of the Musterschule, and to Oberlehrer Dr. Otto Grueters in Düsseldorf.

The Prussian school system is a magnificent organization, but I would not wish to give the impression that it appeared to me as perfect or wholly ideal. The lower forms of the schools are fully as overcrowded as is the case with us, both *Sexta* and *Quinta* had in the Musterschule in first and second year French from 40 to 50 pupils. And in the class-room discipline there was evident too much of the traditional attitude of the *Unter-offizier* toward the raw recruit. Caustic sarcasm and tones of thunder in the class-room have never appealed to my sense of justice. But from numerous conversations on this point, as well as my own observations, I believe that the relationship between teacher and pupil is becoming closer, that the teacher is becoming less the awe-inspiring master and more the helping friend.

The methods of modern language teaching in Lüdenscheid and Düsseldorf tend to confirm Steinmüller's statement<sup>1</sup> that "the majority of the modern language teachers of Germany belong to the moderate re-

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Krause: "The Teaching of Modern Languages in German Secondary Schools," *Pädagogische Monatshefte*, June 1909, p. 180.

formers." In other words, the majority in Germany as in America has adopted an eclectic method, seeking to combine the best offered by both the radicals and the conservatives. But the unprejudiced observer must admit that even the moderate reformers in Germany have advanced a long step nearer the reform than is the case with us. Even the casual visitor to a German school would be impressed by the great amount of oral work, both of individual pupils and of the class in chorus, by the practical elimination of translation from the mother tongue and by the comparatively small amount of ground covered. These features are, I think, characteristic of the German secondary schools in general; in Frankfurt, however, there were two phases of the oral work, though both are in reality intimately related, that were of special interest to me, and it is to these that I would call attention:

1. Actions as the basis of the first oral practice.
2. Development of the active vocabulary.

My remarks will be based upon my own observations in Frankfurt, numerous conversations with Max Walter and two of his most recent publications.<sup>2</sup>

It augurs well for the future of the Direct Method that its advocates, the reformers, are so keen and persistent in their efforts for the perfection of their system. But very few years past they made use of pictures as the basis of their oral exercises (*Anschauungsunterricht*); Walter has, to a certain extent, abandoned this *Bilderdienst*, as he jokingly put it. Observation he has relegated to a somewhat secondary position, in its stead he has placed *action*, and more especially the actions of the pupil.

At the outset the pupil needs only to understand the actions which the teacher describes in the foreign language. As they are actions the words may readily be accompanied by the corresponding action or gesture: I sit down, I stand up; I open the book, I close the book; (then to the class or an individual pupil) stand up, sit down; open the book, close the book, etc. As yet the pupil need not speak, it is his sole duty to understand. Indeed Walter regards it as an error that the pupil should be encouraged to speak at the very beginning. He should first, as the child, learn to understand and perform a number of actions, of course simple and taken from his immediate environment, on the bidding of the teacher. The second step is that the pupil learn to give expression to his own actions or to those of the teacher or of a comrade. For example, it is quite the regular thing for the elementary classes in Frankfurt to accompany the actions of the master on entering the class-room somewhat as follows: You enter the room, you close the door, you go towards the platform, you

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<sup>2</sup> *Aneignung und Verarbeitung des Wortschatzes im Neusprachlichen Unterricht*, Marburg 1907; *Zur Methodik des Neusprachlichen Unterrichts*, Marburg 1908.

mount the platform, you approach the desk, you seat yourself, you open the class-book, etc., etc. When a pupil is called to the board he accompanies his own actions: I stand up, I step out into the aisle, I leave my place, I approach the board, I take up a piece of chalk, I begin to write. And when the assignment is finished another pupil may accompany the actions: You put down the chalk, you take up an eraser, you erase the words, you put down the eraser, you turn about, you go to your place, you stop, you turn about, you sit down. Or, the accompanying words may be in the third person: He stands up; he puts the chalk down; two pupils may perform the same: We stand up; we put the chalk down; they stand up; they put the chalk down. Or, the action is completed and the same pupil or another reviews what has been performed: I stood up; I put the chalk down; he stood up; he put the chalk down. And so, with but comparatively little effort we may teach the mastery of the verb, at least, in its more frequent forms. I have illustrated here, to be sure, but the present and preterite tenses, but the perfect and future would be simply similar variations of the same process.

And what a multitude of such actions is possible for the ingenious teacher, what opportunities doors, windows, desks, book-cases, or even a piece of waste paper lying upon the floor offer. And the beauty of it is, that our apparatus is already supplied, there cannot be the excuse that there is no money for the appropriation. Gradually the scope of such exercises is widened, the outside life of the pupil, his recreations, or home tasks are introduced. To those at all acquainted with the Gouin system the close resemblance will be apparent;<sup>3</sup> Walter would not, however, reduce all actions to the Gouin series. To break the monotony he introduces dialogue; e. g. one of the pupils takes a trip: we have the departure from home, farewells to parents and brothers and sisters; the electric car to the railway station, the conductor making change for the car-fare; arrival at the station, buying the ticket, the purchase of newspapers or books from the news agent, etc., etc. Walter also allows the imagination of the pupil free rein, he even encourages, especially with the younger pupils, a bit of boisterous play. In *Quinta* I saw the story of the French emperor surprised by a foreign ambassador while giving his little son a pick-a-pack ride not only given as a dialogue, but at the same time acted out in the class-room.

But I must hasten to my second point—if these oral exercises accomplished nothing more they would at least accustom the pupil to hear-

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<sup>3</sup> I would call the attention of teachers of German to the series of one hundred and eleven exercises on the lines of the Gouin method, together with a bulletin on their use, prepared by Professor C. H. Handschin, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, sample copies of which may be purchased at a very nominal price on application to the author.

ing and using the foreign idiom, and those of us who attempt to use the language with students who have already devoted two or three years to it would no longer be met with that astonished, injured expression which seems to say: What is the fool driving at?

A systematic effort to increase the active vocabulary of the pupil is one of the most recent developments of the reform movement. The daily memorizing of a certain number of separate words satisfies the pedagogical instincts of such a man as Walter as little as did, years ago, committing the rules of theoretical grammar. The field is a new one and as yet but comparatively little has been done, although the great importance that the development of a larger vocabulary plays in language study is fully realized. This much, however, seems assured: the main source for the increased acquisition in vocabulary is to be carefully ordered and interesting reading matter, well within the comprehension of the pupil.

In Frankfurt the masters are no longer content that the pupil knows the separate word, he must also remember its connection in the passage where he first met it and be able to quote this passage in the foreign language. Several times I witnessed what seemed really remarkable feats of memory. To arouse a drowsy class, or on some other suitable occasion, Walter suddenly called out a word. Hands went up all over the room. One pupil was called upon, who gave the phrase which had been learned illustrating that word, then he called out another word and named the pupil who was to answer. And so it went back and forth, with no delay, no dallying, for five or six minutes, after which the class, now thoroughly alive, resumed its regular routine. And once in *Untersekunda* to show me how firmly these phrases had been impressed upon the memory of the pupils and how closely they were associated with the reading, Walter asked the pupils to give not only the phrase, but also to state in what form it had been learned and in some cases to name the story or text in which it had occurred. In other words, with no warning to the class, they were called upon for a review of their work, some of which had been done five years before. A few halted and stumbled, but they were very few, the great majority came through with flying colors. Other exercises were also witnessed, a reading piece had just been completed and the vocabulary of this was now to be arranged according to definite categories, the use of synonyms and antonyms was continually emphasized and special attention was paid to derivatives—and what a field this last opens to teachers of German!

As a model recitation we may select an hour in *Sexta*, conducted by Professor Dr. Ernst Pitschel. The pupils have been studying French for about two months. As the master enters the class-room his movements are followed by the class in chorus (as given above). When the number of absentees has been noted, which gives occasion for a few questions and

answers, of course all in French, the class work begins. First the days of the week and simple numbers are rapidly reviewed—this gives opportunity to speak of the ages of the pupils, the majority of the class were nine or ten years old, a very few eleven, and of their birthdays. The first strophe of the French version of Uhland's *Ich hatt' einen Kameraden* had already been memorized, this is repeated individually and in chorus; errors in pronunciation are at once pointed out, and generally by one of the pupils, on the ever present *Lauttafel*; and finally the strophe is sung. The second strophe is then taken up. First it is recited slowly and very distinctly verse for verse by the master and repeated again and again by individual pupils and by the class in chorus. The new words are explained, frequently the German equivalent being given, though if possible the word is made clear by gesture or a French paraphrase. Here too the *Lauttafel* is in continual use. The strophe is then written by the master on the board in phonetic transcription, is read and translated several times, with special care in the translation with regard to accuracy; each word is scrutinized and the difference between the German and French versions distinctly emphasized. Finally this new strophe is also sung.

The interest of the class in their work was most apparent, indeed occasionally their ardor needed checking. The amount of work accomplished was remarkable; the *tempo* in which the class was conducted was very fast, even in passing to and from the board the little fellows went on a trot. One often finds it stated that the reform has increased the demands on the teacher, but it is also no less true of the pupil. Closeness of attention and mental agility are more necessary than ever—time and again Walter would interrupt the class work with the cry: *Müller arbeitet nicht mit!*, where occasionally my sympathies were entirely with poor "Müller." In fact, one of the language masters of the Musterschule told me that he had been obliged to change the time of one of his classes so that it should not follow directly upon another language period, because the strain of the previous hour had been so great that the boys were mentally fagged and could not properly perform their tasks.

The question, should we in America adopt the Direct Method in its entirety, must still, in my opinion, be answered in the negative. Even if we had properly qualified teachers, which alas! no one would venture to affirm, I should hold to the same position.

To mention two very important and practical reasons:

1. The German language offers difficulties in forms and syntax quite foreign to French and English, the languages taught by the reformers in Germany. Even in France where the Direct Method has been officially prescribed since 1902, voices have been raised in opposition on just this point; e. g. the recent brochure of A. Pinloche of the University of Lille:

*Des Limites de la Méthode Directe. A propos de l'acquisition des formes syntaxiques et idiomatiques.* Paris 1909.

2. There is not the least doubt but that the great majority of our pupils at the age of fourteen, when ordinarily a foreign language is begun, belong to the visual rather than to the auditory type. The greater part of their previous training has been acquired through the eye and to now give to this sense, already fairly trained, so subordinate a place as the Direct Method demands, seems, to say the least, a great waste.

But on the other hand, I do believe that we can with decided profit approach very, very much nearer the standpoint of the reformers. I do believe that the amount of oral practice in elementary German, especially in the work of the first year, should be greatly increased and that far more attention should be given to the development of the active vocabulary of our pupils. I advocate this not only for the intrinsic value of the exercises themselves for progress in foreign language study, but also because they would be of material aid in eradicating what I believe to be the two most serious evils in our present teaching:

1. The haste with which the average teacher goes over (which in nine cases out of ten means simply the translation of) the home assignment. We measure the progress of our classes by the number of pages read, quite regardless of *how* they have been read. To have four or five pages translated in forty minutes is something of a feat, but could we measure the actual knowledge of our pupils with that of the pupils of the *Musterschule*, who frequently spend eight or nine periods upon the mastery of a single page, there is no doubt where the real superiority would lie.

2. The fact, doubly impressed upon me on my return to this country, that our pupils are the absolute slaves of the dictionary habit, wasting an enormous amount of precious time in looking up the same word over and over again.

For both of these undoubted evils I can imagine no better remedy than a liberal amount of oral drill, not simply haphazard conversation, looking toward the systematic development of a larger active vocabulary and leading ultimately to a greatly increased ability on the part of the pupil to understand and to use the spoken language.